



Press Release

COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Advance release for April 5, 2012

Contact: Greg Wilkinson, (907) 269-7285, Cell (907) 382-7032
gregory.wilkinson@alaska.gov
Ann Potempa, (907) 269-7957, Cell (907) 230-4001
ann.potempa@alaska.gov

State to recognize National Public Health Week with a series of stories

Day 4: April 5 — Preventing the spread of sexually transmitted diseases

ANCHORAGE — The Alaska Division of Public Health is recognizing National Public Health Week with a series of stories centered on the week's theme: A Healthier America Begins Today.

Each day, Monday through Friday, we will focus on a different aspect of health:

- Monday, April 2 — Obesity prevention through active living and healthy eating
- Tuesday, April 3 — Reducing the impact of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs
- Wednesday, April 4 — Preventing communicable diseases through immunization
- Thursday, April 5 — Preventing sexually transmitted diseases
- Friday, April 6 — Mental and emotional well-being

Sometimes the smallest change can make the biggest difference. Small changes in diet and exercise, tobacco use, immunization practices and sexual conduct can help people stay healthy. Yet each year, nearly 1 million Americans die from diseases that could have been prevented.

Sexually transmitted diseases, or STDs, are one of the most critical health challenges facing the nation today. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that there are 19 million new infections every year in the United States. Despite the fact that a great deal of progress has been made in STD prevention over the past four decades, Alaska has had the first or second highest chlamydia infection rate in the United States each year since 2000. Chlamydia is most frequently reported among teens and young adults under age 25.

Most people who have chlamydia don't know it — as the disease often has no symptoms. If left untreated, chlamydia infection can lead to serious health problems.

Testing for chlamydia is as easy as urinating in a cup. In Alaska, people who are sexually active should be tested every year and those who have infection should be tested for re-infection within three months of treatment. Screening and re-testing after infection helps to reduce the risk of complications from chlamydia. Also, having chlamydia or gonorrhea makes a person more susceptible to HIV.

Alaska has also seen a recent increase in reported HIV and syphilis cases. Most reported cases involve men having sex with men, and men who meet partners on the Internet. These increases in Alaska are also seen nationwide. The CDC and Alaska Department of Health and Social Services urge sexually active men who have sex with men to be tested each year for HIV, syphilis and other STDs. Those men who have multiple or anonymous partners should seek screening more frequently.

The most reliable ways to avoid becoming infected with or transmitting STDs are to abstain from sex, be in a long-term sexual relationship with an un-infected partner, use precautions, and get tested.

“Talking with your children about their knowledge, values and attitudes related to sexual activity is an important first step you can take to help protect them from sexually transmitted infections,” said Susan Jones, HIV/STD program manager for the state. “Education is one of the most important tools we have in stopping the spread of STDs in Alaska.”

Another small step that is helping stop the spread of STDs is expedited partner therapy. The state began the practice in January 2011. Expedited partner therapy allows a public health worker or a person diagnosed with chlamydia or gonorrhea to give medicine to the patient’s partner or partners. “The important part here is stopping the spread of the disease,” said Jones.

Locations for HIV/STD testing sites are available on line at www.hivtest.org, or www.IKnowMine.org

Free test kits for chlamydia and gonorrhea are available through the mail at www.IWanttheKit.org.

More information on STD awareness is at: <http://www.cdcnpin.org/stdawareness/> and <http://www.cdc.gov/std/stats10/trends2010.pdf>

Information on STDs in Alaska is online at: <http://www.epi.hss.state.ak.us/default.jsp>

April 6 — Mental and Emotional Health

###

DHSS is now on Twitter. Follow health updates at [www.twitter.com/Alaska_DHSS](https://twitter.com/Alaska_DHSS).